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VI.—*Narrative of the Progress of Arctic Discovery on the Northern Shore of America, in the Summer of 1839.* By MESSRS. PETER W. DEASE and THOMAS SIMPSON. Communicated by Sir J. H. PELLY, Bart., Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

*Fort Simpson, Oct. 16, 1839.*

HON. SIRS,—We have the honour to report the completion of all the primary objects of the expedition—the entire fulfilment of Governor Simpson's original instructions, under which it has been our good fortune to act, and something more; though, as we plainly told your Honours last winter, it was quite out of the question to think of reaching the strait of the Fury and Hecla from the Coppermine River.

On the 22nd of June we descended that impetuous stream to the Bloody Fall, where we remained until the 28th. This interval was employed by Mr. Simpson in exploring Richardson's River, discovered in 1838, which discharges itself, as we then supposed, into the bottom of Back's Inlet, in latitude  $67^{\circ} 54' N.$ , longitude  $115^{\circ} 56' W.$  A party of about thirty Exquimaux were encamped there, all of whom fled precipitately to the hills except one family, whose tent was placed on an island in the stream. With these last a communication was opened, through our interpreter Ooligbuck, but the circle of their little lives being confined to Berens' Isles and the borders of Richardson's River, they had no information to impart of any value.

On the 3rd of July the first slight opening occurred in the sea ice, of which we took instant advantage; but our first week's journey did not exceed 20 miles, and it was the 18th, after sad work, before we could attain Cape Barrow. From its rocky heights we beheld, with equal surprise and delight, the wide extent of Coronation Gulf partially open; whereas, long after the same date in 1838, the whole party might have crossed it on foot. At midnight on the 20th we landed at Cape Franklin, just one month earlier than Mr. Simpson's arrival there on his pedestrian journey of the year before. A violent easterly gale arrested our progress for the next four days; and on the 27th and 28th we encountered great peril in doubling Cape Alexander amidst very heavy driving ice.

From Cape Alexander, situate in lat.  $68^{\circ} 56' N.$ , long.  $106^{\circ} 40' W.$ , to another remarkable point in lat.  $68^{\circ} 33' N.$ , long.  $93^{\circ} 10' W.$ , the Arctic coast may be comprised in one spacious bay, stretching as far south as lat.  $67^{\circ} 40'$  before it turns off abruptly northward to the last-mentioned position. This vast sweep, of which but an inconsiderable portion was seen by Mr. Simpson last year, is indented by an endless succession of minor

bays, separated from one another by long narrow projecting points of land, enclosing an incalculable number of islands.

From this description it will be evident that our route was an extremely intricate one, and the duties of the survey most harassing; but, whilst perplexed beyond measure in finding our way through these labyrinths, we derived great advantage from the protection afforded by the islands from the crushing force of the seaward ice; and the weather was generally clear. In fact, the most serious detention caused by ice on this part of the voyage was from the 1st to the 5th of August, on a point that jutted out beyond the insular chain. White Bear Point, as it was called, lies in lat.  $68^{\circ} 7' N.$ , long.  $103^{\circ} 37' W.$ , variation  $54^{\circ} 45' E.$  These bays and masses of islands present a distinct succession of geological features, which can be best illustrated by our series of specimens of the rocks that compose this wild and barren coast. Vestiges of Esquimaux, mostly old, were met with wherever we landed. They appear to subsist in single families, or very small parties, and to travel inland for the deer-hunt in the month of June, not returning to their sealing islands till the ice sets fast, in October. A river, twice the size of the Coppermine, which falls into the sea in lat.  $68^{\circ} 2' N.$ , long.  $104^{\circ} 15' W.$ , is much resorted to by reindeer and musk-oxen in the summer season.

Finding the coast, as already remarked, trending northerly from the bottom of the great bay, we expected nothing less than to be carried round Cape Felix of Captain James Ross, contrary to the conjecture hazarded by Mr. Simpson in his narrative of last year's journey. On the evening of the 10th of August, however, (at the point already given,) we suddenly opened a strait running in to the southward of east, where the rapid rush of the tide scarcely left a doubt of the existence of an open sea leading to the mouth of Back's Great Fish River. This strait is 10 miles wide at either extremity, but contracts to 3 miles in the centre. Even that narrow channel is much encroached upon by high shingle islands, but there is deep water in the middle throughout.

The 12th of August was signalised by the most terrific thunder storm we have ever witnessed in these regions. Next day it blew roughly from the westward, with a very dense cold fog; but we ran rapidly south-east, passed Point Richardson and Point Ogle of Sir George Back, and continued on till the darkness of night and the increasing gale drove us ashore beyond Point Pechell. The storm shifted to the north-east, and lasted till the 16th, when we directed our course, with flags flying, to the Montreal Island. On its northern side our people, guided by Mackay, soon found a deposit made among the rocks by some of Sir George Back's party, but, as Mackay seemed to think, without that officer's knowledge. It contained two bags of pemican and a

quantity of cocoa and chocolate, all perfectly rotten, besides an old tin vasculum and two or three other trifling articles, of which we took possession as memorials of our having breakfasted on the identical spot where the tent of our gallant, though less successful, precursor stood on his return from Point Ogle to the Great Fish River, that very day five years before.

The arduous duty we had, in 1836, undertaken to perform was thus fully accomplished; and the length and difficulty of the route back to the Coppermine would have amply justified our immediate return. We had all suffered more or less from the want of fuel and the deprivation of warm food, and the prospects grew more cheerless as the cold fall weather stole on apace; but, having already ascertained the separation of Boothia from the American continent, on the western side of the Great Fish River, we determined not to desist till we had settled its relation thereto on the eastern side also. A fog which had come on dispersed towards evening, and unfolded a full view of the picturesque shores of the estuary. Far to the southward Victoria headland stood forth so clearly defined that we instantly recognised it by Sir George Back's exquisite drawing. Cape Beaufort we almost seemed to touch; and with the telescope we were able to discern a continuous line of high land as far round as north-east, about two points more northerly than Cape Hay, the extreme eastern point seen by Sir George Back.

The traverse to the farthest visible land occupied six hours' unremitting labour at the oar; and the sun was rising on the 17th when we scaled the bluff and singularly shaped rocky cape to which our course had been directed. It stands in lat.  $68^{\circ} 4' N.$ , long.  $94^{\circ} 35' W.$  The azimuth compass, by Jones, settled exactly in the true meridian, and agreed with two others, by the same maker, placed on the ground. From our proximity to the magnetic pole, the compass had latterly been of little or no use; but this was of the less consequence as the astronomical observations were very frequent. The dip of the needle, which at Thunder Cove (12th of August) was  $89^{\circ} 29' 35''$ , had here decreased to  $89^{\circ} 16' 40'' N.$  This bold promontory, where we lay wind-bound till the 19th, was named Cape Britannia, in remembrance of our glorious country. On the beetling rock that sheltered our encampment from the sea, and forms the most conspicuous object on all this part of the coast, we erected a conical pile of ponderous stones, 14 feet high, that, if not pulled down by the natives, may defy the rage of a thousand storms. In it was placed a sealed bottle, containing a sketch of our proceedings; and possession was taken of our extensive discoveries in the name of VICTORIA THE FIRST, amidst the firing of guns and the enthusiastic cheers of the whole party.

On the 19th the gale shifted from N.E. to E.S.E.; and after crossing a fine bay, due E., with no small toil and danger, the coast bent away N.E., which enabled us to effect a run of 40 miles. Next day the wind resumed its former direction, and after pulling against it all the morning among the shoals and breakers, and gaining only 3 miles, were obliged to take refuge in the mouth of a small river.

From a limestone ridge, about a league inland, we obtained a view of some very remote blue land in the N.E. quarter, in all probability one of the southern promontories of Boothia. Two considerable islands lay far in the offing, and others, high and distant, stretched from E. to E.N.E.

Our view of the low main shore was confined to 5 miles in an easterly direction, after which it appeared to turn off greatly to the right. We could, therefore, scarcely doubt our having arrived at that large gulf uniformly described by the Esquimaux as containing many islands, and with numerous indentations stretching down to the southward till it approaches within 40 miles of Repulse and Wager Bays. The exploration of such a gulf, which was the main object of the Terror's ill-starred voyage, would necessarily demand the whole time and energies of another expedition, having a starting or retreating point much nearer to the scene of operations than Great Bear Lake; and it was quite evident to us that any further foolhardy perseverance could only lead to the loss of the great object already attained, together with that of the whole party. We must here be allowed to express our admiration of Sir John Ross's extraordinary escape from this neighbourhood, after the protracted endurance of our ships, unparalleled in arctic story. The mouth of the stream which bounded the last career of our admirable little boats, and received their names, lies in lat.  $68^{\circ} 28'$  N., long.  $93^{\circ} 7'$  W.; variation of the compass  $16^{\circ} 20'$  W. The strong wind that had forbidden our advance gave wings to our retreat. The same night, the 20th of August, we landed once more at Cape Britannia, and next morning we crossed direct to Point Pechell, with a heavy sea. On the 22nd we explored a long narrow bay on the west side of Point Ogle, which extends to the 68th parallel of latitude. The north wind blew roughly, with sharp frost, and next day we got no farther than Point Richardson. Thence we crossed over, on the 24th, to what had from the continent appeared like two islands, but which we rightly conjectured to form part of the southern shore of Boothia; or, to speak with greater precision, of that land on which stands Cape Felix of Captain James Ross. This shore we had the satisfaction of tracing for about 60 miles, till it turned up to the north, in lat.  $68^{\circ} 41'$  N., long.  $98^{\circ} 22'$  W. Only 57 miles from Ross's Pillar the dip of

the needle was  $89^{\circ} 29' N.$ ; the magnetic pole bearing N.N.E., distant 90 miles: the variation, as shown by both the azimuth compass and the horizontal bar needle was  $45^{\circ} E.$  The objects seen on this coast are easily enumerated—a low uninteresting limestone tract, abounding nevertheless in reindeer, musk-oxen, and old native encampments. To the westward a good deal of ice appeared; and vast numbers of snow-geese passed high overhead, in long triangular flights, bound for milder skies.

Whilst engaged in taking observations our men constructed another durable memorial of our discoveries, which was saluted in the usual manner. Then, recrossing the strait on the 25th, we resumed for some time our outward route, only keeping more along the seaward verge of the islands, so as to shape a straighter course.

The weather, from being threatening and unsettled, soon became unequivocally severe. On the 29th of August a snow-storm began that lasted for seven days, during four days of which we were fixed to a single spot by the violence of the N.W. gales, while the frost was so keen that the pools among the rocks on which we lay became solid enough to bear a man. A more moderate interval succeeded this fierce outbreak. Quitting the continent again, at the large river already mentioned, we struck N.N.W., for an extensive island 22 miles off, which we coasted N.W. for 20 miles; and, shortly before sunset on the 6th of September, stood out from thence due N. for the nearest point of Victoria Land, which proved equally distant. We have never seen anything more brilliant than the phosphoric gleaming of the waves when darkness set in; the boats seemed to cleave a flood of molten silver, and the spray, dashed from their bows before the fresh breeze, fell back like showers of diamonds into the deep. It was a cold night; and when we at last made the land, cliffs, faced with eternal ice, obliged us to run on for a couple of leagues before we could take the shore with safety. The coast of Victoria Land, which we explored for upwards of 150 miles, is incomparably the boldest we have met with in these seas. Often, near the shore, no bottom could be found with 35 fathoms of line; and the cerulean blue colour of the water everywhere indicated a profound depth. There are several noble bays, the largest of which, N.W. of Cape Alexander, is 20 miles wide, and equally deep, backed by snow-clad mountains. It attains to  $69^{\circ} 40' N.$ , the highest latitude of this voyage. At length we reached the extreme point seen by Mr. Simpson, from Cape Franklin, in 1838, where the coast of this large country begins again to trend northward of west; Cape Barrow being by computation S.S.W. distant 50 miles. On the 10th of September we crossed this magnificent strait with a strong E.S.E. or side wind and a rough

sea, in which our gallant boats, old and worn out as they were, acquitted themselves beyond our most sanguine hopes. Our return from Cape Barrow was miserably retarded by furious N.W. winds and severe stress of weather. Winter permanently set in on the 15th of September; and next day, to the undisguised joy of the whole party, we re-entered the Coppermine River, after by far the longest voyage ever performed in boats on the Polar Sea. Leaving one of our little craft, together with the remains of the pemican (which through age and long exposure was become quite mouldy), and various other articles, as a prize to the first Esquimaux who may visit the Bloody Fall, we ascended the river with our double crew in four days, abandoned our tents and everything but absolute necessities; crossed the barren grounds up to the knees in snow, having unluckily left our snow-shoes on the coast, and safely reached Fort Confidence at dusk on the 24th. The fisheries had failed sooner than ever; and we had good reason to congratulate ourselves on not being doomed to pass a third winter within the Arctic Circle.

After settling with the Indians, liberally rewarding the most deserving, and supplying all with ammunition gratuitously, we took our departure on the evening of the 26th, in two inland batteaux; one belonging to the expedition, the other came from Fort Simpson sixteen days before our arrival.

Our passage of Great Bear Lake was most boisterous and inclement in crossing the body of the lake and other considerable traverses; our boats, with everything in them, and even the very clothes on our backs, became converted into shapeless masses and concretions of ice. It was high time for us to escape from Great Bear Lake, for the temperature, which was at  $4^{\circ}$  below zero when we landed at the head of the river on the evening of the 4th of October, fell  $10^{\circ}$  lower in the course of the night; and next day we descended the rapid stream in the very midst of the driving ice. On entering the Mackenzie we experienced a temporary mitigation of this excessive cold; but we should most assuredly have stuck fast above Fort Norman had not the northern gales again rose in their strength, and while they shattered and dispersed the rapidly forming ice, enabled us to stem the current under close-reefed sails. At noon on the 14th of October, after forcing our way, with no small risk, through the torrent of ice forced out by the rivers of the mountains, we reached this place, and were cordially welcomed by our valuable friend chief-trader M'Pherson, who had for some time given up all hopes of our arrival.

Most of our people are still afflicted with acute pains and swellings in the limbs, caused by cold and exposure; and we are

assured by Mr. M'Pherson that he has never known or heard of so early or vigorous commencement of winter in M'Kenzie's River: on the other hand, so fine a spring as that of 1839 seldom visits these frozen regions; and to this favouring circumstance, under Providence, ought our signal success be partly ascribed.

*Oct. 30.*—The state of the ice at length enables us to despatch couriers to Slave Lake. In the mean time Governor Simpson's highly valued letter of the 17th of June, which unfortunately missed us in our way hither, has cast up overland. We rejoice in having anticipated the Russian expedition, and secured to our country and the company the indisputable honour of discovering the north-west passage, which has been an object of search to all maritime nations for three centuries. When our expedition was planned at Norway House, in 1836, it was confidently expected that Sir George Back would have achieved the survey of the Gulf of Boothia with the Terror's boats, and that our meeting at the mouth of the Great Fish River would have left no blank in the geography of northern America. That officer's failure, the exhaustion of our men and means, and the necessity of a new wintering ground, render a fresh expedition indispensable for the examination of the Gulf of Boothia; the circuit of which, to the Strait of the Fury and Hecla, according to the Esquimaux accounts, cannot be less than 400 or 500 miles. It only remains for us to recommend to your approbation the plan proposed by Mr. Simpson, to perfect this interesting service; which, as he had no wish to avail himself of the leave of absence granted, he is prepared to follow up whenever the limited means required are placed at his disposal.

We have the honour to be

Your most obedient humble servants,

PETER W. DEASE.

THOMAS SIMPSON.

*To the Governor, Deputy-Governor, and  
Committee of the Hudson's Bay Com-  
pany, London.*



*Discoveries of Mess<sup>r</sup>s Dease & Simpson in 1838-9.*

To face p.274.



*Chart of the Coast from Coronation Gulf to Boat River constructed from the narrative.*